



November 8, 2021

Joint Technical Corrections Committee

HB 1507

Katie Ralston, Director of Workforce Division, ND Department of Commerce

Hello, Chairman Weisz and members of the Joint Technical Corrections Committee. My name is Katie Ralston, and I have served as the director of the workforce division at the North Dakota Department of Commerce since January 2020. In my role, I also have the pleasure of serving as the director of the industry-led Workforce Development Council. I'm here in support of House Bill 1507, because preparing today's students for tomorrow's jobs is crucial to sustaining a talent pipeline for North Dakota employers, and even more important for the success of our future employees.

Lack of available workforce is arguably one of North Dakota's greatest challenges right now. The problem is multifaceted and centered around a lack of people and a mismatch of skills needed to fill our open jobs. Preparing for the workforce starts with our youngest learners and it's important that we give them opportunities to develop the skills they need to be successful when they enter the world of work.

It is concerning that only 3.9% of our students graduate with a foundational computer science class. This trend will only perpetuate another problem that we're working to address right now: North Dakota adults who lack foundational digital literacy skills. In fact, 32% of unemployed adults in our state lack these skills which is disqualifying them from 72.2% of open jobs right now. What this number doesn't speak to are the number of employed individuals who struggle in their work, because they don't have the basic computer and cybersecurity skills needed to perform daily functions using the technology they have at their fingertips. That's an incredible skill mismatch and one that we need to address with students now, to prevent this problem from progressing in the future.

Today, nearly every job is an IT job and reliance on technology will increase across all industries. When reviewing North Dakota's most in-demand jobs, it's easy to see how nearly all interact with technology through the devices used, email and the internet, not just in the work that's performed in these jobs, but in the training programs designed to prepare workers in these fields. Having foundational digital skills is already expected in the same way as strong communication skills, ability to work with others, punctuality, and more and it's important that we equip our students for success in the workplace.

By passing HB 1507, we will support the creation of a talent pipeline that has the skills that North Dakota employers need to fill their open jobs, maintain operations, and grow. Thank you for the opportunity to share my support for this bill. I am happy to answer your questions.